

Chapter 1



SELF-CARE AND WELLBEING



Wellbeing Strategies for Nurses, First Edition. Claire Boyd.

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this chapter, you will have an understanding of the importance of self-care and wellbeing in healthcare to help with compassion fatigue, burnout, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Different approaches to wellbeing techniques will be explored, including acupuncture, acupressure, yoga, Qigong, Tai Chi, and massage.

How are you feeling today? I ask this because we know the NHS is in a 'jobs crisis' with large numbers of healthcare professionals in the UK leaving the profession, citing as their reasons for leaving 'pay, working conditions and feeling under huge pressure'. Those leaving the profession often are not replaced, and the shortfall of healthcare professionals is reaching record levels, which puts more pressure on those still hanging on and caring for the vulnerable.

But who is looking after you? We do need to look after ourselves, as laid out by the Nursing & Midwifery Council document 'Future Nurse: Standards of Proficiency for Registered Nurses' (2018). This document states that at the point of registration, the nurse will:

- 1.5 understand the demands of professional practice and demonstrate how to recognise signs of vulnerability in themselves or their colleagues and the action required to minimize risks to health
- 1.6 understand the professional responsibility to adopt a healthy lifestyle to maintain the level of personal fitness and wellbeing required to meet people's needs for mental and physical care.

In short, it is all about self-care and wellbeing. We need to care for ourselves and our colleagues, which may be easier said than done in today's healthcare climate.



Self-care

The actions we take for ourselves to remain fit and healthy and understand when we can look after ourselves and when we need to seek help from other healthcare professionals.

Wellbeing

Represents a broader bio-psycho-social construct that includes physical, mental, and social health.



The self-care process can start by reflecting on what makes us happy. When we are going through trying times, it can be easy to focus on the negative aspects of our lives – causing us even more stress and anxiety. Before we go down a negative spiral, it is important to focus on the things that make us happy. Moving from the negative to the positive is an important aspect of the healing process. And note that we may need help with this process (counselling, general practitioners, etc.).

COMPASSION FATIGUE

Unique to the healthcare sector is the occupational stressor known as **compassion fatigue**, whereby the carer connects with a patient and feels how they are feeling. This opens them up to absorbing and experiencing the patient's trauma, suffering, and pain – known as **vicarious traumatisation**. This exposure stimulates our fight-or-flight response, which we then continually suppress, leading to consequences for our physical and mental health.

The symptoms of compassion fatigue can be seen in Table 1.1.

If we ignore the body's response to vicarious trauma, the physical symptoms will only get worse. This is when we need

Table 1.1 Symptoms of compassion fatigue.

Phase 1	Anxiety	Vicarious trauma stimulates the nervous system into flight or fight, and you feel the effects of adrenaline on the body – raised heart and breathing rates, shaking, and muscle tension. It becomes harder to think clearly and concentrate and may be harder to sleep. It becomes more difficult to relax.
Phase 2	Irritability	Chronic stress may induce headaches, fatigue, and multiple minor illnesses as the immune system becomes compromised. The tension may affect your musculoskeletal system, causing chronic neck and back pain. You may eat more (or less) than usual.
Phase 3	Withdrawal	As you experience chronic fatigue and constant aches and pains, you may start to neglect your physical and emotional health. If you take time off from work, you do not feel any better on your return.
Phase 4	Robot	These symptoms are very similar to those suffering from depression and also include headaches, generalised aches and pains, digestive problems, and a feeling of low-level anxiety and very low mood.

to take steps to care for ourselves before we experience burnout.

BURNOUT

Burnout is a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterised by three dimensions:

- 1 Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
- 2 Increased mental distance from one’s job or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one’s job
- 3 Reduced professional efficacy

Risk factors associated with increased susceptibility to developing Burnout Syndrome can be seen in Table 1.2.

Table 1.3 shows some of the actions we can take to prevent Burnout Syndrome in the workplace.

Table 1.2 Risk factors in developing Burnout Syndrome.

Individual risk factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor self-esteem • Poor coping strategies • Idealistic world view • Unrealistically high expectations • Financial issues
Organisational risk factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy workload • Conflicts with co-workers • Diminished resources • Lack of control or input • Effort-reward imbalance • Understaffing • Rapid institutional changes
Risk factors for nurses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variability in work schedules • Rapid turnover of patients • End-of-life events • No breaks during shifts

Table 1.3 Action steps to prevent Burnout Syndrome.

Manage	Understand that there are ways in which you can manage your work-related stressors that put you at risk of Burnout Syndrome.
Engage	Engage in the support of management, co-workers, friends, and family that may help you cope with stress – this is not a weakness.
Breaks	Take breaks at work and away from work. Go outside for a walk to get some fresh air during your breaks.
Enjoyment	Think about what you enjoy about your work, and focus your attention on your interests and passions.
Techniques	Gain techniques to be used at work when dealing with stressful work experiences and after work to relax and recharge.

STRESS-RELIEVING STRATEGIES

To effectively combat stress, we need to activate the body's natural relaxation response. We are all unique human beings, and stress-relieving strategies are not a case of 'one size fits all'. Each of us has preferred calming stress busters. The following bullet points show some of the strategies you may utilise to reach a state of calm and unwind after a stressful day or on a day off:

- Spending a day at a spa
- Eating chocolate
- Drinking a glass of wine at the end of the day
- Taking a walk in the country
- Going for a swim
- Going to the hairdresser/having your hair washed
- Going for a run
- Meditating
- Going somewhere for quiet time (stillness)
- Going to the gym
- Reading a book
- Undertaking some arts and crafts (hobbies)
- Watching a movie
- Listening to music
- Going to a café for a hot beverage (and a piece of cake) with friends
- Soaking in a warm bath
- Having a massage
- Gardening
- Playing with your pet animal
- Watching a football/rugby match (could be stressful if your team lose)
- Doing yoga
- Working on a jigsaw puzzle
- Modelling with LEGO bricks

I live in the West of England, and one of my favourite ways to destress is to go for a short walk in the Cotswold countryside and then stop in an Olde Worlde tea shop for a cup of tea and some cream scones (jam first, cream on top). Sometimes I forego the walk! (Several of my colleagues like to go to the gym after work – I can't think of anything worse!) My husband likes to snuggle up on the settee with a hot cup of tea, dunking his biscuits (yuk!) whilst watching a good movie on Netflix. In other words, it really is horses for courses. Also, everything in moderation: we should not become dependent on pouring alcohol down our gullets to 'feel better' as this could be a slippery slope.

The important thing is that we all need an outlet for our stress. Good health relies not just on the physical aspect but also the mental health aspect – a truly holistic approach. Also, if money is an issue, as it is for most of us, unless you

can dip in the sea or go in for wild swimming in the local riverways, paying to swim in the local swimming pool or visiting the hairdresser frequently may be impractical due to cost.

Making ‘Me Time’

Sometimes we may feel we don't have enough hours for such luxuries as 'me time' because work and life encroach on our precious days. When we are not at work, we may have family life to contend with, washing, shopping and cooking, or simply catching up on sleep due to exhaustion. Perhaps we also have assignments to complete. Believing we can't spare a little time for self-care is a false economy. You can't run a car on fumes; the car requires refuelling when almost empty, just like the body needs calm time to combat stress. You take medicine for a headache, so why not take medicine for the soul, as stress-relief strategies are often called? Caring for your mental health is not a luxury. Using the car analogy again, if the engine breaks down, the car won't work. If the body is struggling due to stress, you won't be efficient in your work or personal life.

EXERCISE 1.1 Yoghurt Mask

Spending a little time for yourself need not cost a fortune. A nice pampering exercise if you have a little plain yoghurt left over is to use it as a face mask, which will leave your skin feeling refreshed and smooth. Remember to put some old towels under your head on the pillow for spillage!

One of the most beneficial substances to use as a face pack is yoghurt (live, natural yoghurt, full-fat if possible). Fresh, live yoghurt can help all skin types, particularly excessively dry or oily skin. The lactic acid in yoghurt (due to its fermentation) is similar to that of the skin acid mantle and appears to exert a balancing action on the secretions of skin fluids.

Add mashed-up banana, papaya, or any over-ripe fruit of your choice to two teaspoons of yoghurt. Rub the mixture into your face. Relax. You may wish to put two cucumber slices on your eyes (to reduce puffiness). Rinse off with plenty of water.



Healthcare Stress

We have already seen how working in healthcare can be extremely stressful. In the first quarter of the twenty-first century, the world was introduced to the coronavirus pandemic, and healthcare workers were hailed as heroes for caring for unprecedented numbers of patients with the virus. Many worked extra shifts to cover for colleagues isolating with the virus or on sick leave, perhaps due to sheer exhaustion. We also needed to care for patients – the death and grief of the patients who knew they were dying. We are not robots, so these sad memories will stay with us forever. Caring for the carer has never been so important.

DID YOU KNOW?

One in nine health staff left the NHS during the coronavirus pandemic – and the exodus is speeding up, according to official figures (2022). 140 000 workers quit amid the crisis, and according to staff surveys, another 31% are thinking of leaving. Exhaustion, low pay, and stress were cited as reasons for this exodus. Unison's Christina McAnea states that staff are suffering from exhaustion, burnout and PTSD in some cases (<https://www.pressreader.com/uk/sunday-mirror/20220424/281582359187651>).



PTSD

Post-traumatic stress disorder. A mental health condition that develops following a traumatic event, characterised by intrusive thoughts about the incident, recurrent distress/anxiety, flashbacks, and avoidance of similar situations.

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

It is safe to say that finding a strategy for stress relief has never been so important. It is really just finding the strategy that works for you. Roughly speaking, the most popular approaches can be grouped into seven main categories, as shown in Table 1.4. We will look at each of the examples throughout this book and/or in this chapter.

Table 1.4 Seven tactics for stress relief.

Tactic 1	Focus your mind to bring about the relaxation response.	Examples: Deep breathing (Chapter 4) Meditation (Chapter 12) Mindfulness (Chapter 13) Progressive muscle relaxation (Chapter 5)
Tactic 2	Redefine the situation mentally so that it is no longer viewed as a threatening situation.	Examples: Humour (Chapter 11) Imagery (Chapter 14)
Tactic 3	Use Eastern methods to restore your mental and physical balance.	Example: Acupressure (Chapter 2)
Tactic 4	Use yoga/yoga breathing to calm the mind and relax the body.	Examples: Yoga breathing (Chapter 2) Yoga (Chapter 2)
Tactic 5	Relieve muscle tension through exercise and massage.	Examples: Stretching (Chapter 2) Massage (Chapter 1) Physical exercise (Chapter 7)

(Continued)

Table 1.4 (Continued)

Tactic 6	Fill your mind with thoughts of pleasure rather than threats.	Examples: Aromatherapy (Chapter 9) Music (Chapter 15) Nature (Chapter 6) Social support (Chapter 10)
Tactic 7	Use coping strategies for stress before stress becomes a problem.	Examples: Eating well (Chapter 7) Hydrating well (Chapter 7) Sleeping well (Chapter 3)

Overthinking

Even the most chilled of us get stressed at times – going over and over a situation in our mind and being unable to shake off these thoughts. Perhaps we had a difficult shift or received harsh feedback from an assignment or the placement we are on. These thoughts may make us anxious and lead to depression over time. But we can do something about it.

Stop and rethink: Going over the same negative situation again and again is not healthy. Look for the positives instead of concentrating on the negatives, no matter how small you think they are. Many people have told me that when a family member became ill, it put all their stress and anxieties about other things into perspective.

Example: *spoke harshly to my colleague and feel bad about this. I can't stop feeling upset about this.*

Finding the positive: *With hindsight, I now believe that I did not speak over-harshly, and she does need to concentrate on the task in hand for patient safety. I did the right thing.*

Make time to worry: Set aside some time to write down all your worries. Then work through the list to find solutions to the problems you can control and let go of the things you can't control.

Example: Can't afford to pay all my bills this month. Speak to the bank about extending my overdraft.

Did not get the promotion I went for. Let this go as I was too good for them. Look out for other Band 6 positions and work on my interview skills.

Seek help: If you feel you can't find a solution to your worries, never hesitate to seek help.

Examples:

If you worry about your job – speak to your manager.

If you worry about your mental health – speak to your GP or workplace counsellor.

If you worry about money – speak to your bank and/or Union, who have financial advisers.

Remember to speak to your colleagues, friends, family, and professionals – do not suffer alone.

If you feel your negative thoughts are becoming overwhelming, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can help to reframe your negative thoughts, enabling you to cope with your anxiety.

STUDENT TIP

As a first-year student, I once worked with a third-year student who just didn't like me. That's fine as we can't get along with everyone. Instead of going over and over thinking about what I was doing to make her dislike me so much, I turned this around and realised that the problem was actually hers, which helped to relieve my stress. I was always polite and professional to her. The last I heard, she left the nursing profession – some people just aren't cut out to be kind and compassionate.

Taking Control

If you ever think 'I can't do anything about my problem', your stress will inevitably get worse, as this feeling of loss of control is one of the main causes of stress and lack of wellbeing. Taking control is empowering and a crucial part of finding a solution.

However, you need to accept the things you can't change, as changing a difficult situation is not always possible. It is therefore important to concentrate on the things you have control over.

Research in Treating Anxiety and Psychological Disorders

Anxiety and psychological disorders affect 264 million people worldwide. Unfortunately, anti-anxiety medications aren't effective for everyone, and many of these drugs have unwanted side effects. As a means of understanding the brain networks and mechanisms that underlie fear and anxiety and hopefully offering a new and better approach to treatments, Bristol University researchers have been studying the brain's cerebellum. The cerebellum is connected to many regions of the brain that are linked to survival, including the PAG (periaqueductal grey).

TERMINOLOGY

The **periaqueductal grey** is a structure in the brain that coordinates survival mechanisms, including the 'freezing' behaviour when we feel paralysed with fear.

Researchers have found that the PAG can form a 'fear memory' when fear is felt, accompanied by freezing, meaning the cerebellum encodes a fear memory that returns and replays (think post-traumatic stress). The Bristol University researchers have shown that manipulating the cerebellar-PAG pathway can lessen fear-conditioned freezing in animals.

The Bristol University Researchers explain:

Our results show that the cerebellum is part of the brain's survival network that regulates fear memory processes at multiple timescales and in multiple ways, raising the possibility that dysfunctional interactions in the brain's cerebellar-survival network may underlie fear-related disorders and co-morbidities. (www.mirror.co.uk/lifestyle/health/hope-scientists-targeting-new-area-26970056)

This has radically changed our way of thinking about anxiety. Previously, we believed anxiety was generated in deep brain centres such as the amygdala and in response to stress

hormones. Finding this other site for anxiety in the cerebellum gives a whole new approach for drugs and therapies, targeting new ways of treating psychological conditions such as PTSD.

EXERCISE 1.2 Melting the Ice Sculpture

This is a good exercise to help release the anxieties and tension that lead to stress:

- 1 Close your eyes and imagine a beautiful ice sculpture of a swan in front of you.
- 2 Mentally list anything in your life that is causing stress: at work, at home, anywhere.
- 3 Each time you think of something, say it out loud. Imagine that as you say it, a warm gust of air travels towards the ice swan, and the sculpture begins to melt.
- 4 Continue venting all your worries and watching the swan melt before you.
- 5 Soon all your worries have turned the swan into a crystal clear puddle of water, taking all your stress with it.



DID YOU KNOW?



The Japanese have invented a 'scream jar'. This is a handheld jar that you can scream into to let out all your stress. You put the jar neck up to your mouth and literally scream into it. It is soundproofed, so you may only hear a faint whisper.

Learning New Skills

Learning some simple yoga poses may help with stress levels in ways we did not know previously. Research has shown that learning new skills can improve your mental wellbeing by:

- Boosting self-confidence and raising self-esteem
- Helping to build a sense of purpose
- Helping you connect with others

Even if we feel we do not have time or do not need to learn new things, there are many ways we can incorporate this into our lives, such as:

- Learning to cook something new
- Working on a DIY project (something we have been meaning to fix for a while)
- Signing up for a course that interests us, such as learning a new language
- Signing up for a class in something we have always wanted to learn, like Salsa dancing or yoga
- Taking up a new hobby

LOOKING AT THE EASTERN APPROACH

There are many Eastern approaches to healthcare, some of which you may have heard of and others not: Qigong, Tai Chi, feng shui, acupuncture, reiki, shiatsu, and yoga, to name just a few. We shall look at four of these: Qigong, Tai Chi, acupuncture, and yoga and yoga breathing.

Eastern approaches to healthcare include methods for relieving stress by restoring mental and physical balance. The basic belief of the Eastern approach is that stress, disease, and injury disrupt the vital energy inside the body, whilst meditation, breathing exercises, movement, and massage help to restore it.

Acupuncture and Acupressure

Acupuncture has long been used within the NHS to treat conditions such as pain, hypertension, insomnia, stress, depression, etc. Acupuncture uses needles that are placed along the body's meridians, known as acupoints.

TERMINOLOGY

Meridians: Channels that direct the flow of energy through specific pathways of the body, much like the circulatory system transports blood around the body.

Another technique using acupoints is acupressure. Acupressure practitioners stimulate the acupoints using fingers or other tools. As with acupuncture, each point is said to affect particular organs or tissues of the body. Most scientific studies have concentrated on needle acupuncture, but acupressure without needles has also been found to affect health and wellbeing.

A 2002 report by the World Health Organisation (WHO) listed 28 diseases, symptoms, and conditions for which acupuncture, in controlled trials, was shown to be an effective treatment. A further 63 trials showed favourable results, but further trials were recommended.

It is still not known exactly how acupressure works, but scientists have sought to explain it:

- It is simply a relaxing form of massage.
- A report from the United States (section of the National Institutes of Health – National Centre for complementary and alternative medicines) states that acupuncture points may be strategic conductors of electromagnetic signals. Stimulating the meridians may enable electromagnetic signals within the body to be relayed at a faster rate than normal. These signals may cause the release of brain chemicals (such as endorphins, etc.) that reduce pain sensations and feelings of wellbeing. This may also activate the immune system.

EXERCISE 1.3 Acupressure

The acupressure point for stress is located on the ear. Try this technique and see if it works for you:

- 1 Remove any jewellery from the ear. Do not try this exercise if your ears are sore or infected, obviously! Close your eyes, and grasp both earlobes between your thumbs and index fingers. Gently squeeze and pull the lobes downward. Take three deep breaths.
- 2 Move your thumbs and fingers a little higher up the outer edge of the earlobe. Lightly pinch, holding for a few seconds. Continue moving all the way up the outside of the ear: i.e. pinch and hold and move upward.
- 3 When you get to the top of the ears, gently squeeze and pull the ears upward. Take three deep breaths.
- 4 To finish, lightly cup your ears with your hands.

YOGA

The word **yoga** may conjure in your mind an image of a person in impossible poses. Whilst it is true that there are many different styles of yoga varying in intensity and focus, some aspects of this ancient practice can be quite easy to follow. Yoga brings together the mind and the body, using **focussed breathing** exercises, **meditation**, and **physical poses** designed to encourage relaxation and reduce stress. We will look at a focused breathing exercise, a typical yoga breathing meditation, and a couple of easy-to-perform poses. But first, Table 1.5 shows 16 benefits of yoga that are supported by scientific evidence:

Table 1.5 16 benefits of yoga.

1. Yoga improves flexibility.	Flexibility is an important component of physical health. Yoga offers many styles to choose from, varying in intensity from high to moderate to mild. Even the lowest-intensity styles have been found to increase flexibility.
2. Yoga helps with stress relief.	Scientific research supports that yoga can reduce stress, but we need to remember that the physical practice is only one aspect of yoga. Other aspects of yoga, such as meditation and breath work, have also been shown to significantly lessen tension and relieve stress.
3. Yoga improves mental health.	Both movement-based yoga therapies and breathing-based practices have been shown to significantly improve depressive symptoms and other mental health disorders.
4. Yoga may reduce inflammation.	Research studies have found that yoga of various styles, intensities, and durations can reduce the biochemical markers of inflammation across several chronic conditions.
5. Yoga can increase strength.	Studies have shown that some types of yoga can be considered strength-building.
6. Yoga may reduce anxiety.	The yoga practice of body scan/guided meditation has been shown to reduce symptoms of anxiety.
7. Yoga may improve quality of life.	A study in 2019 showed a promising potential for yoga to improve quality of life (as defined by the WHO) in people with chronic pain.

(Continued)

Table 1.5 (Continued)

<p>8. Yoga may improve immunity.</p>	<p>Chronic stress negatively affects the immune system. Some studies have found a link between practising yoga and better immune system functioning.</p>
<p>9. Yoga may improve cardiovascular functioning.</p>	<p>Yoga breathing can improve the functioning of several systems in the body. By controlling the pace of breathing, the cardiovascular system can make favourable changes in heart rate, stroke capacity, arterial pressure, and contractility of the heart.</p>
<p>10. Yoga may improve sleep.</p>	<p>Yoga has been shown to improve how quickly someone falls asleep and how deeply they stay asleep.</p>
<p>11. Yoga may improve self-esteem.</p>	<p>Studies have shown positive results when using yoga to improve self-esteem and perceived body image in adolescents and young adults.</p>
<p>12. Yoga may improve bone health.</p>	<p>Many postures in yoga are isometric contractions (the length of the muscles holding a pose does not change, although they are fully engaged). These isometric exercises, especially when performed with the joints in flexion, have been found to increase bone density, although more studies need to be performed.</p>
<p>13. Yoga can promote better posture and body awareness.</p>	<p>Studies have found that yoga improved brain functioning in the centres responsible for interception (recognising the sensations within your body) and better posture.</p>
<p>14. Yoga can improve brain functioning.</p>	<p>Practising yoga has been found to activate areas of the brain responsible for motivation, executive functioning, attention, and neuroplasticity.</p>
<p>15. Yoga can help with burnout.</p>	<p>Studies have found that yoga-based meditation interventions can reduce the effects of burnout as individuals become more in-tune with and more likely to listen to their body's signals and respond appropriately.</p>
<p>16. Yoga can improve balance.</p>	<p>Falls in healthcare facilities can lead to decreased quality of life in individuals and even death in some cases. Research suggests that balance may improve for most people after consistently practising yoga.</p>

Yoga Breathing

Breathing techniques play a large role in many relaxation techniques, so it is little wonder that focused breathing is such an important aspect of yoga. We will look at different breathing techniques in more depth in Chapter 4. But let's try the cooling breath technique (known as Sitkari Pranayama), so-called due to its effects, when practised correctly, of calming and 'cooling' the nervous system, combatting stress and anxiety.

EXERCISE 1.4 The Cooling Breath

- 1 Sit comfortably on the floor or a chair, ensuring that the spine is erect with a natural curve and relaxing the shoulders.
- 2 Open your mouth slightly, and place your tongue gently behind your top teeth.
- 3 Inhale through your mouth as you raise your chin.
- 4 Close your mouth, and exhale through your nose as you lower your chin to a neutral position.
- 5 Repeat 8–12 times.



Yoga Meditation Breathing Script

This next exercise is a typical yoga meditation breathing script.

EXERCISE 1.5 Meditation Breathing Script

- 1 Sit or lie in a comfortable position, and give yourself permission to relax and unwind.
- 2 Just sit quietly for 2–10 minutes.
- 3 Close your eyes. Turn your attention to your everyday breath, and listen to the sound and movement as it flows softly in and out through your nose.
- 4 On your next breath, slowly breathe in and quietly count 'One'.
- 5 Breathe out, and count 'Two'.

- 6 Breathe in, and count ‘Three’.
- 7 Breathe out, and count ‘Four’. Continue counting your breaths up to 10.
- 8 When you reach the number 10, go back to 1 and repeat the practice for 2–10 minutes.
- 9 If your mind wanders during the practice and you lose concentration, return your attention to your breath and begin counting from one.
- 10 When you are ready, slowly open your eyes and enjoy the feeling of calm for a moment.



Note that you do not have to sit in the cross-legged yoga position to perform this exercise – unless you want to, of course!

Yoga Poses (for the Beginner)

Muscle tension is often a side effect of stress. Stretching can loosen the muscles, which can help with aches, pains, and stiffness and help to relax the mind. Don't be put off by these poses; they are designed for yoga beginners. Even I can do them without needing a hoist to get me back to a standing position!

One very simple pose is the Easy Seated Pose, another name for sitting cross-legged. Get seated in a cross-legged position – with practice, you can try to keep your feet directly below your knees. Keep your hands on your knees or lap, and try to keep your back straight. Don't hunch over or keep your head down.

EXERCISE 1.6 Yoga Poses for Beginners

Cat pose



This pose is good for giving your back a good stretch.

Get on all fours, and then push your palms down as you ‘round’ your back. Keep your head down and your arms straight, and hold this pose. Basically, you want to keep your back curved like a bow (as in bow and arrow).

Cobra pose



This pose is also known as an upward-facing dog and is good for stretching your back.

Lie on your stomach with your feet slightly apart, placing your palms directly under your shoulders. Pull your chest forward and up, creating a deep backbend and lengthening your tailbone.

Bridge pose



This pose is also good for strengthening your back.

Lie on your back with your arms at your sides and your legs bent. Then lift your hips. Hold your body in this position for a few breaths. Keep your feet planted close to your hips.

Mountain pose



This is a standing pose and helps to keep your body aligned.

Stand with your legs together or hip-length apart. Keep your shoulders pushed down and away from your ears. Make sure your back is straight. You want to lengthen up through your spine. Your arms should be at your sides with your palms up.

Tree pose



This pose strengthens the muscles in the legs and improves ankle and thigh strength.

One foot is planted on the ground. Your other foot should slide up your inner thigh or calf. Your hands go upward in a prayer-like motion.

Corpse pose



Holding this pose requires mental concentration. It is usually performed by expert yoga practitioners at the end of a more physical workout.

You literally just lie flat on your back, keeping your arms to your sides. You can cover yourself with a blanket to keep warm.

DID YOU KNOW?

A recent study linked the ability to balance on one leg for 10 seconds with life expectancy. The test, known as the Flamingo test, found that middle-aged people who cannot balance on one leg for 10 seconds are at a dramatically increased risk of dying within seven years. To conduct the test, you need to:

- 1 Take off your shoes.
- 2 Put your hands on your hips and stand on one leg, bringing your other leg halfway up your calf.
- 3 See how long you last.

Failure to perform the task for 10 seconds could indicate a possible neurological or orthopaedic disorder, weight gain, inactivity, inner ear issues, or too little sleep or exhaustion. Interventions could then be implemented to prolong life.

You can improve your balance with activities such as yoga.



QIGONG

Qigong was developed in ancient China and Tibet and is a mind-body exercise form that uses meditation, breathing, and movement. It is often practised outside in parks and performed in silence. Basically, it consists of movements that you perform for certain situations, such as stress relief or to 'open the lungs'.

There are many Qigong exercises, but a simple one is called 'Bouncing on heels to shake off stress and illness' (not a very snappy title)! This exercise stimulates the immune system and removes stress and illness from the body whilst promoting clarity and increasing energy.

EXERCISE 1.7 Bouncing on Heels to Shake Off Stress and Illness

You will need to breathe deeply and slowly throughout the exercise:

- 1 Stand flat-footed with your heels together and toes apart in a V formation.
- 2 Breathe in and raise your palms upward as you bend your knees.
- 3 Breathe out as you push your hands towards the floor, straighten your legs, and rise up onto your tip-toes. Hold for three seconds.
- 4 Bounce on your heels seven times in a relaxed, natural way. On the eighth bounce, stand flat-footed and shake your body eight times.
- 5 Bend your knees up and down whilst throwing your arms down.
- 6 Repeat all these movements from the start eight times.

TAI CHI

Tai Chi is another ancient Chinese exercise form. It is a series of movements that work on the entire body in a flowing sequence – often described as meditation in motion. Tai Chi is believed to reduce stress and anxiety and help increase flexibility and balance. One very simple exercise that can be performed almost anywhere is the ‘pouring’ exercise.

EXERCISE 1.8 Pouring Exercise

- 1 Stand with your feet on the floor, parallel, shoulder-width apart.
- 2 Pour your weight onto one leg and hold.
- 3 After a few breaths in and out, begin to slowly pour your body weight onto the other leg and hold.
- 4 Do this for a few minutes, clearing your mind and becoming aware of your balance.

BODY MASSAGE

Massage is the application of pressure to the soft tissues of the body, such as the skin, muscles, tendons, and ligaments. The general purpose of massage is to reduce tension

and stress, improve blood and lymphatic circulation, and remove toxins. It also reduces oedema, aids healing of soft-tissue injuries, controls pain, and promotes overall wellbeing by releasing endorphins.

Massage may therefore be used to relax or invigorate, depending on your needs and level of stress and the techniques used: e.g. effleurage for a soothing effect on sensory nerves and relaxing contracted, tense muscles to induce **relaxation**, or **atonement** to tone muscles and stimulate sensory nerve endings.

In clinical trials, massage has been found to relieve anxiety and depression and improve health in other areas, such as easing back pain and labour pain. Massage can therefore be shown to have a role in the ‘stress war’. It is suggested that to benefit fully from the beneficial effects of massage, you should seek out a professional massage therapist, but we may not all have access to a professional masseuse, perhaps due to financial constraints. Therefore the next exercise shows how to give a very basic back massage without essential oils (just a commercial massage cream or oil). All you need is a willing partner or friend and a very light touch. A quick word of caution: only perform a massage on someone without any underlying medical conditions (leave that to the professionals).

EXERCISE 1.9 How to Give a Basic Back Massage

- 1 Choose a comfortable location (massage couch, bed, or floor).
- 2 Put down a soft mat, such as a yoga mat, and spread a clean towel over it.
- 3 Prepare the room (subdued lighting, aromatherapy candles, ambient music and a warm temperature).
- 4 Have the person expose their back and lie face down. Make a horse-shoe shape with a towel for them to place their face on. To support the individual’s lower back, put a cushion beneath their ankles.
- 5 Tell the person you are about to begin, and remind them to take a slow deep breath to help with their relaxation.

- 6 Put massage oil in the palms of your clean hands.
- 7 Spread the oil on the back using the whole of your hands, starting at the bottom of the person's back and moving in an upward direction towards the heart whilst applying light pressure. Then bring the hands down the outside of the back, again lightly. This is known as **effleurage**.
- 8 Repeat this technique for three to five minutes whilst gradually increasing from light to medium pressure – this will warm the back muscles.
- 9 Now for the shoulder and neck area: use shorter circular strokes with more pressure – a technique that uses rolling and pressing. This is known as **petrissage**. Go across the entire back for two to five minutes.
- 10 Cup your hands and make brief, repetitive contacts with the back. This is known as **percussion**.
- 11 Use muscle-lifting techniques by making a lobster-claw shape with your hands (close your fingers and hold out the thumb).
- 12 Apply pressure in a twisting, lifting motion, moving up and down the back two to three times.
- 13 Use a fanning technique: first, position yourself at the person's head area and place your thumbs at the top of the back, just below the neck and on either side of the spine. Use a fanning motion with your thumbs extended. Glide down towards the lower back. Do not apply pressure on the spine.
- 14 Next, move to the person's side. Apply twists by reaching around the far hip with one hand whilst resting the other hand on the near hip. With a fluid motion, pull one hand towards you as the other hand pushes away. Move up the back to the shoulder area, then come back down again. Repeat three times.
- 15 Finish with a couple of effleurage strokes on the back.



STUDENT TIP

There are many inexpensive handheld massage devices on the market, both electronic and static. You can even use a tennis ball.

EXERCISE 1.10 Three Self-Massage Techniques

Massage for headache

This massage is good for a throbbing headache.



Neck massage

This massage will help to relieve tension and ease the pain.



Massage for aching feet

This massage can help relieve aching feet after you have been on them all shift.



- 1 Place your thumbs high on your cheekbones, by your ears.
- 2 Gently apply pressure to your temples in a circular motion with your fingertips.
- 3 Continue making circles as you move along your hairline until your fingertips meet in the middle of your forehead.

- 1 Place two or three fingertips on the back of your neck where your neck meets your shoulders.
- 2 Apply firm pressure, and hold the area.
- 3 Release when the muscles feel more relaxed.
- 4 Roll your shoulders forward and backward slowly.
- 5 Repeat three times.

- 1 Sit in a comfortable chair with your feet bare.
- 2 Position a tennis ball under your feet.
- 3 Roll back and forth from the heel to the toe using firm pressure.
- 4 If you come across a painful or tender area, work the knot by rolling in small circles.
- 5 Do this exercise on both feet.
- 6 To add more pressure, try performing this technique whilst standing.



Chapter 1 Activity

Have a Luxurious Soak in the Bath

Place a few scented candles around the bathroom, and soak in a luxurious bubble bath.

If you don't have a bath, only a shower, you can purchase some essential oil steamers: you place these on the shower tray, furthest from the water, and the steam from the shower releases the essential oils from the steamer, scenting the bathroom like a spa.



KEY POINTS

- NMC: Future Nurse: Standards of Proficiency for Registered Nurses (2018)
- Self-care
- Wellbeing
- Compassion fatigue
- Burnout
- Stress-relieving strategies

- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Taking control
- Relaxation techniques
- Treating anxiety and psychological disorders – a new brain approach
- Eastern approaches for stress relief
- Acupuncture and acupressure
- Yoga
- Body massage
- Self-massage techniques
- Qigong
- Tai Chi

WEB RESOURCES

'NHS Lost One in Nine Staff in Pandemic': <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/sunday-mirror/20220424/281582359187651>

'NHS Sickness Absence During Covid-19 Pandemic': <https://www.bmj.com/content/372/bmj.n471>

Treating anxiety and psychological disorders by targeting new areas of the brain: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/lifestyle/health/hope-scientists-targeting-new-area-26970056>

Self-massage techniques: <https://backintelligence.com/self-massage-techniques>

Yoga: <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/13-benefits-of-yoga>; www.yogainspires.co.uk

Yoga breathing: <http://www.yogalondon.co.uk/blog/yoga-breathing-exercise>

Burnout Syndrome: www.thoracic.org

NHS Employers (2018) Workforce Health and Wellbeing: www.nhsemployers.org/?-?media/Employers/Publications?Health-and-wellbeing/NHS-Workforce-HWB-Framework

NHS Live Well: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well>

Sleepio (a sleep-improvement program): <https://good-thinking.uk/sleepio>

Flamingo balance test: <https://nypost.com/2022/06/22/flamingo-test-reveals-likelihood-of-dying-within-7-years>

Taking control to combat stress: <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/tips-to-reduce-stress>

